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World Social Situation 2016: Leaving No One Behind — the Imperative of Inclusive Development

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note provides an overview of *Report on the World Social Situation 2016* and sets out the report's main conclusions and policy recommendations. The full report is being issued as a United Nations sales publication.

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I. Introduction

1. Humankind has achieved unprecedented social progress over the past decades. Poverty has declined dramatically across the world and people are healthier, more educated and better connected than ever before. Yet, progress has been uneven. Social and economic inequalities persist and, in many cases, have worsened. In every country, some individuals and groups confront barriers to full participation in economic, social and political life.

2. Against this backdrop of high inequalities, inclusiveness and shared prosperity have emerged as core aspirations under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[1] A central pledge of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind and to see all goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society, and to endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.[2] This core message echoes the commitment to foster social justice, equality and inclusion made by Governments at the World Summit for Social Development, 21 years ago, and is founded on the fundamental principle that development will not be sustainable unless it is inclusive.

3. The focus of the 2030 Agenda on inclusiveness underscores the need to identify who is being left behind and in what ways, which is what *Report on the World Social Situation 2016* sets out to do. Specifically, the report examines patterns of social exclusion and considers whether development processes have been inclusive, paying particular attention to the links among exclusion, poverty and employment trends. In so doing, the report hopes to stimulate research, action and a broader debate on the actions needed to leave no one behind.

II. Social inclusion and exclusion

4. Social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to fully participate in social, economic, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to such a state.[3] Participation may be hindered when people lack access to material resources, including income, or to employment, land, housing or services such as education and health care — essential foundations of well-being which are captured in the 2030 Agenda. Yet, it is also limited when people do not have voice and cannot exercise their rights and when their dignity is not accorded equal respect. Thus, social exclusion entails both material deprivation and feelings of alienation, inferiority and lack of agency or control over important decisions. Poverty is therefore an important dimension of exclusion, but not the only one. People are often excluded owing, for instance, to a disability or because of their sexual orientation without necessarily living in poverty.

5. Under target 10.2 of the 2030 Agenda, which is to fulfil the aspiration to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all members of society by 2030, attention is drawn and emphasis given to attributes that have

[1] Resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

[2] Ibid., para. 4.

[3] The general term "social exclusion" therefore refers, in both the present note and the forthcoming report, to the concept of lack of participation in or exclusion from economic, political, cultural, civic and/or social life, with lack of participation in political processes, in civic life or in the labour market being considered a symptom of overall social exclusion.

considerable influence on the risk of exclusion, namely, "age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status".[4] Indeed, an individual's chances in life depend significantly on group ascription, although the extent of exclusion suffered by groups depends heavily on the institutions, norms and policies in place.

6. Within this context, the report perceives social inclusion as the process of improving the terms of participation in society of people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. It contends that promoting social inclusion requires both removing barriers to people's participation, including certain laws, policies and institutions as well as discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, and taking active inclusionary steps to facilitate such participation.

7. Identifying a set of criteria for determining who is excluded and in what ways is key to tracking progress and assessing the impact of measures taken to promote inclusion and ensure that no one is left behind. Measuring social exclusion across countries, however, poses considerable challenges for several reasons. First, people are excluded from many domains of life — social, economic, political, civic and spatial — and the salience of each domain depends heavily on country context, as well as on a person's stage in the life cycle. That is to say, the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion are multidimensional and context-dependent, and translating them into a limited set of measurable indicators applicable across countries is difficult. Furthermore, while an adequate assessment of exclusion requires objective indicators of the status of individuals and social groups, it must also take into account their subjective judgments and perceptions. Second, data needed to measure the multiple dimensions of exclusion are generally derived from a variety of sources which differ in terms of scope and purpose. The resulting lack of data comparability hampers comprehensive international assessments and the review of trends over time. Third, not all social groups are statistically visible or accounted for. For example, assessments of social exclusion rely primarily on household surveys which, by design, omit groups at high risk of exclusion and poverty, namely, homeless persons, people in institutions, and mobile, nomadic and pastoralist populations, while underrepresenting other groups.

8. Taking these challenges into account, the report examines three sets of indicators: those that measure access to opportunities, namely, education, health services and infrastructure; those that measure access to employment and income; and those that measure participation in political, civic and cultural life. It takes a relative approach to exclusion: instead of establishing a threshold under which individuals or groups would be considered excluded, it interprets the disparities revealed by those indicators across selected groups as symptoms or outcomes of the exclusion of those who are lagging behind or participating less.

9. It is clear that the extent of social exclusion, the groups affected by it and the social problems it encompasses vary not only by context but also over time. The report highlights the impact on exclusion of major trends in climate change; demographic change; and technological change, namely, advances in information and communications technologies (ICT), recognizing that, in many ways, the world has become less tolerant of exclusion over time. Through the spread of democratic

[4] Resolution 70/1, Goal 10, target 10.2.

ideals and the demand for equal rights, some Governments have been led to loosen policies that sustain unfair treatment and have created opportunities for political participation. Meanwhile, the expansion of education and improvements in ICT are enabling more people to make more informed choices and exercise voice. However, these advances have not been sufficient to eliminate disadvantages and promote inclusive societies. Recent political events, including policy responses to the large movements of people seeking to escape war and destitution in their own country, as well as the effects of climate change, challenge the promotion of inclusive development.

III. Key dimensions of exclusion

10. The critical linkages among poverty, economic inequality, decent-work deficits and social exclusion have been well acknowledged in the international policy arena. At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in March 1995, Governments recognized that the common pursuit of social development aimed at social justice and equality requires not only the fostering of social integration, but also the eradication of poverty and the promotion of full employment. Through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Governments and the international community at large have reaffirmed with renewed urgency that striving for an inclusive world means addressing several interdependent goals, including the eradication of poverty, the reduction of inequalities, the pursuit of inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all.

A. Poverty, income inequality and exclusion: a vicious cycle

11. To the extent that material deprivation is a major hindrance to social inclusion, the global progress made in reducing extreme income poverty bodes well for inclusive development. While nearly half of the world's population lived in extreme poverty (currently measured at $1.90 per day) in 1990, the proportion had declined to 12.7 per cent by 2012.[5] However, additional data suggest caution in interpreting these global trends as an early indication of success in eradicating poverty. The evidence presented in the report suggests, for instance, that there has been little improvement in the situation of those living in deep poverty and that many people who have escaped poverty remain vulnerable to it.

12. Trends in inequality also suggest that prosperity has not been shared equitably, with income inequality having risen in many countries within the last 20 years. In general, income inequality across social groups constitutes a significant share of total income inequality, although its relative weight varies strongly by country. For instance, inequality between ethnic or racial groups accounted for over 50 per cent of total inequality in South Africa in the mid-2000s, 30-50 per cent of the total in Guatemala, Panama and Paraguay, and less than 15 per cent of total income

[5] The World Bank released revised income poverty estimates based on a new set of purchasing power parity (PPP) conversion factors and a corresponding new income poverty line of $1.90 per day in October 2015.

inequality in many developed countries.[6] Along similar lines, inequality between rural and urban populations explained over 50 per cent of total inequality in Senegal but less than 10 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and the Niger.[7]

B. Decent-work deficits and exclusion

13. Jobs constitute an important foundation for social inclusion, particularly when they provide sufficient earnings as well as access to social protection, decent working conditions and prospects for personal development. Beyond being an important source of income, employment often confers social identity and acceptance. In contexts of widespread poverty, even an informal job can bring social recognition as well as autonomy and agency.

14. Over the last two decades, labour-market participation has helped millions of people escape poverty and has economically empowered women and other disadvantaged groups. While in some cases, it has promoted the social inclusion of those groups, in others, it has reinforced existing divides. Overall, however, economic growth and, more broadly, development, have not been sufficiently inclusive, as they have failed to reduce decent-work deficits. Many individuals and families cannot rely on stable decent jobs as a means of coping with risks or ensuring secure livelihoods. The risk of holding a poorly paid, precarious or insecure job is higher today than it was in 1995. Rapid progress in reducing poverty notwithstanding, 13.5 per cent of workers in developing countries are living in extreme poverty (below $1.90 a day), a figure that calls into question the notion that jobs — any jobs — are the main solution to poverty.[8] A significant and persisting share of workers are outside the realm of regulation and have not been adequately represented in social dialogue and consensus-building processes within the world of work. While some informal jobs do become stepping stones to formal work and empower those who hold them, particularly women, most trap individuals and groups in a spiral of low productivity, poverty and exclusion. For instance, according to data for four developing countries — China (urban areas), Colombia (urban areas), South Africa and Turkey — only 8-35 per cent of workers in informal jobs transition to formal jobs annually, while the rest simply move on to other informal jobs.[9] The probability of transitioning to unemployment or inactivity is higher among workers in informal employment than among those in formal employment. Decent-work deficits, in particular among young people, raise fears of social instability and put the social contract under threat.

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[6] World Bank, *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development* (Washington, D.C., 2005). See also Chris Elbers and others, "Re-interpreting sub-group inequality decompositions", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 3687 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, August 2005).

[7] Ibid.

[8] International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook 2016: Transforming Jobs to End Poverty* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2016).

[9] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Employment Outlook 2015* (Paris, 2015).

IV. Who is being left behind and from what? Trends and patterns of social exclusion

15. The report confirms that attributes such as age, ethnicity, race, gender, place of residence and migration and disability status continue to affect the risk of being left behind in both rich and poor countries and can be the basis for precluding some groups from full participation in society. Yet, the risks faced by each of these groups do not result in uniform disadvantages across countries or regions: the extent of exclusion and its outcomes depend on context, including local institutions, norms and attitudes as well as the laws and policies in place.

16. While lagging behind in education or access to health services, or facing barriers to political participation, alone, cannot be equated with social exclusion, the report shows that disadvantages in all of these domains generally reinforce one another, which means that lower levels of health and education go hand in hand with higher levels of poverty and unemployment, as well as less of a voice in political and civic life. It is the accumulated disadvantages among certain social groups that the report takes as being symptomatic of their exclusion.

17. While the inequalities observed are often rooted in historical circumstances, they tend to persist, even after the structural conditions that created them have changed. The evidence presented shows that some ethnic groups continue to experience significant disadvantages in countries that no longer erect formal barriers to their participation. Nevertheless, discrimination continues to play a key role in holding some groups back, as the report also shows.

18. It is important to note that, while the analysis provided in the report is based on statistically visible groups, the groups that are omitted from household surveys and censuses are often those at the highest risk of being left behind. Often, it is when groups gain political recognition and social movements promote the enforcement of their rights that countries begin to identify them and make concrete efforts to include them in censuses and surveys.

A. Denial of opportunities

19. Equipped with education and health, people can acquire the skills and capabilities need to participate fully in all the dimensions of life. Access to these basic social services, which is therefore viewed as a fundamental right, defines life opportunities. Whereas many facets of high and persisting inequalities polarize political debates across countries, there is clear consensus on the need for education and health care to benefit all persons regardless of their circumstances — that is, consensus on the need for those services to be universally accessible. Yet, in both developed and developing countries, there are enduring disparities in school enrolment, educational attainment and learning outcomes based on factors external to a student's inherent capacity to learn, namely, ethnicity. In Europe, for example, at least 10 per cent of Roma children aged 7 to 15 were not in school in Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy and Romania in 2011, as compared with less than 5 per cent of non-Roma children.[10] Regarding educational attainment, on average, in 19 countries

[10] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States: Survey Results at a Glance* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2012).

with data, the proportion of youth (aged 15 to 24) who have completed lower secondary education is twice as high among youth in the main ethnic group as among youth in the most disadvantaged ethnic minority.[11] Similarly, not all individuals and groups have benefited equally from improvements in health. Measures that take into account mortality, illness and functioning, such as health-adjusted life expectancy, tend to show wider gaps based on socioeconomic status or place of residence, than life expectancy at birth. Gaps in health-adjusted life expectancy based on socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, for instance, tend to be wider than those observed through life expectancy at birth.[12]

20. The analysis in the report highlights the need to monitor progress separately in different dimensions of social inclusion. It shows, for instance, that some social groups have seen more rapid reductions in child mortality, while others have benefited from relatively stronger reductions in malnutrition;[13] and that progress in closing child health gaps among ethnic groups has not necessarily been mirrored by equitable improvements in access to infrastructure and vice versa.

B. Unequal income-generating prospects

21. There are also significant disparities in access to the labour market, employment opportunities, wages and overall income across social groups. Not only are disadvantaged groups more likely to live in poverty, but they experience deeper poverty and are more likely to remain in poverty over the long term than the rest of the population. In the labour market, indigenous peoples, members of other ethnic minorities and international migrants receive wages lower than those of the rest of the population, as do women, who, when working full time, earn on average 10-30 per cent less than men.[14] The exclusion of youth from the labour market is of particular concern because of its long-term effect on well-being as well as its impact on social cohesion and stability. Over 40 per cent of the world's active youth are either unemployed or working but living in poverty.[15] In countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) alone, almost

[11] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Inequality Database on Education. Available at http://www.education-inequalities.org. Accessed 22 July 2016. Average based on data from Afghanistan, Belize, Brazil, the Central African Republic, Chile, Costa Rica, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, South Africa, Suriname, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Trinidad and Tobago.

[12] Eileen M. Crimmins and Aaron Hagedorn, "The socioeconomic gradient in healthy life expectancy", *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, vol. 30, No. 1 (2010), pp. 305-321.

[13] Andy Sumner, "The new face of poverty: How has the composition of poverty in low income and lower middle-income countries (excluding China) changed since the 1990s?", *IDS Working Paper*, No. 408 (Brighton, United Kingdom, Institute of Development Studies, November 2012).

[14] Gillette H. Hall and Harry Anthony Patrinos, "Towards a better future for the world's indigenous peoples", in *Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Development*, Gillette H. Hall and Harry Anthony Patrinos, eds. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012); OECD and European Union, *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2015); and *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.XVII.8).

[15] International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: Scaling Up Investments in Decent Jobs for Youth* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2015).

39 million young people (15.5 per cent of all youth) were neither working nor in education or training in 2014.[16]

22. Labour-market disadvantages are not simply due to differences among workers in terms of their education, skills or place of residence. The report's analysis shows that most of the occupational differences observed among ethnic groups persist, for instance, once the effects of educational attainment and other sociodemographic characteristics are accounted for. The labour market continues to reflect socially driven distinctions based on ethnicity, race, age, gender and other personal attributes that should have no bearing on job opportunities or workers' competencies.

C. Unequal participation in political, civic and cultural life

23. Participation in political, civic and cultural activities is crucial to promoting inclusion. Individuals and groups who are excluded from participating in political or cultural processes also have limited voice or limited power to affect the attitudes, norms, institutions and policies that drive social exclusion in the first place. In addition, some forms of political and civic participation reveal subjective aspects of social inclusion that are not captured by merely assessing the socioeconomic status of individuals and groups.

24. In many countries, racial and ethnic minorities, migrants, women and young people vote less frequently and are less likely to be represented in government by individuals belonging to the same social group. Here, too, education and income lead to a higher level of political engagement as measured by voting behaviour. In some cases, lower voter turnout is also the result of institutional barriers to registering and voting — for one thing, the right to vote in a country is generally granted only to citizens. However, differences in voting patterns often remain even when formal restrictions imposed on voting are not present, suggesting that there are other barriers at play as well.

25. Lack of engagement in political activities among some individuals and groups is a cause for concern, undermining as it does the main foundations of democratic governance, namely, representation, rule of law and protection of freedom and rights. Data shown in the report indicate, for instance, that levels of trust and confidence in the police and the courts are lower among racial and ethnic minorities in several countries, which challenges the legitimacy of these institutions in protecting the rule of law for all and promoting good democratic governance.

26. In the context of participation in social life, social networks are an important source of support, power and agency for individuals, groups and communities that face multiple forms of social exclusion. Frequent contact with family, friends and neighbours provides social support which has positive effects on health and well-being. In many cases, members of vulnerable and marginalized groups enjoy participation in densely configured networks of community group relations. What they lack is the power and capital needed to achieve their ends.

[16] OECD, Youth inactivity, OECD Data, 2015. Available at https://data.oecd.org/youthinac/youth-not-in-education-or-employment-neet.htm. Accessed 22 July 2016.

V. Prejudice and discrimination: barriers to social inclusion

27. The prejudicial treatment of people on the basis of their identity or their characteristics is a particularly pervasive cause of exclusion. Across countries, there are laws and policies that discriminate against individuals and groups in all spheres of life, although much has been done to put an end to the application of discriminatory laws in recent decades; nonetheless, discriminatory practices continue to underpin group-based differences even in cases where discriminatory laws have been eliminated.

28. Public registration of incidents of discrimination, for example, through legal action taken against employers or public authorities and reports of incidents of hate crimes, have limited value for cross-country comparisons or even for assessing time trends, as willingness and opportunities to report discrimination depend on the policy and social environment, including the efficacy, real or perceived, of the police and the justice system. Some surveys have, instead, assessed perceived instances of discrimination. Results of the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey show, for instance, that in 2008, 1 in 4 respondents felt discriminated against owing to ethnic or immigrant origin, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, with perceived discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or immigrant origin being most significant in this regard.[17] Field experiments combining experimental methods with field-based research also show large differentials in treatment based on race, ethnicity and migrant status in various domains, including in job interview call-backs, apartment rentals and examination results.

29. Persistent exposure to discrimination can lead individuals to internalize prejudice or stigma in the form of shame, poor self-esteem, fear, stress and poor mental and physical health. It may further affect achievement and diminish a person's sense of agency — that is, his or her capacity to make decisions and act on them. Thus, individuals can effectively behave in ways that conform to how others perceive them.

30. While discrimination is decried across the globe and there are legal obligations and guidelines to fight it, much work remains to be done on behalf of achieving a world free of discrimination and prejudice. Continued efforts to capture the extent, manifestations and effects of discrimination constitute a necessary step towards realizing this goal.

VI. Pathways towards social inclusion

31. The report concludes that despite many positive trends, ranging from broader representation of disadvantaged groups in political processes to a reduction of inequalities in access to education, group-based inequalities vary significantly across countries and by group. Whether development is leaving some people behind — and, consequently, whether or not it is promoting social inclusion — depends on context as well as on the indicators used to assess progress.

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[17] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS): Main Results Report* (2009). Available at http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/663-FRA-2011_EU_MIDIS_EN.pdf.

32. The report's analysis underscores the inextricable linkages among the objectives of achieving poverty eradication, full employment and decent work for all and social inclusion, core commitments to which were made at the World Summit for Social Development. Those objectives are now integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Summit's broad vision of social development as a process that involves a fairer distribution of opportunities and resources to foster social justice, equality and the participation of all people in social, economic and political processes strategically underpins the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The report further highlights the Summit's people-centred approach to development and the emphasis placed on integrated policy frameworks for tackling inequalities, which are also reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda.

33. There is growing recognition of the importance of inclusion for strengthening not only the social, but also the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. However, this awareness has not yet translated into political commitment or the necessary normative shifts that, as the report argues, are imperative for inclusive development. Instead, over-reliance on market mechanisms, a retrenchment of the redistributive role of the State and growing economic inequalities have contributed to social exclusion and, over the last several decades, have even placed the social contract under threat in many crisis-ridden and fragile countries. Where identity-based disadvantage is deliberately supported by the dominant majority, Governments may not have been urged to tackle it. Yet, correcting asymmetries in power, voice and influence is not only the right thing to do, but necessary for promoting inclusive development, at both the national and global levels.

34. The commitment to leave no one behind, as expressed in the 2030 Agenda, is an important step in the right direction and echoes the commitment made at the World Summit for Social Development to ensuring that every individual participates in social, economic, political and cultural life with equal rights. But framing goals in universal terms, alone, does not ensure universality. For instance, despite the aim, under the Millennium Development Goals, to achieve universal primary education, some children were left behind, as the report shows. The extent to which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development helps to promote social inclusion will depend on the form and strength of its implementation.

35. The report's analysis shows that leaving no one behind calls for broadening opportunities to promote inclusion as well as tackling the structural barriers faced by excluded individuals and groups. The report discusses two main policy imperatives to reach this goal.

36. The first is to pursue a policy framework that is rooted in universal principles coupled with special measures aimed at addressing the obstacles that confront disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable groups. Special efforts are needed, even if temporarily, to overcome the barriers some groups face and make the universal provision of goods and services more effective in promoting social inclusion. Governments should design those measures in ways that minimize stigma and capture by local elites, and must integrate them fully into broader social protection systems. Policies aimed at tackling discrimination, as well as those that provide preferential access to some services, can enable the active participation of excluded persons and communities in policy dialogue and decision-making processes.

37. Identifying groups that are left behind and therefore in situations necessitating the application of special measures may require better household- and individual-level data, increased data disaggregation, and strengthened capacity of many statistical offices, as well as openness to new directions in innovative social research. However, where available, improved data alone have not driven all countries or organizations to address the barriers faced by disadvantaged groups. In contrast, some countries have effectively addressed such barriers with imperfect information. Ultimately, ensuring that all individuals are afforded the same rights and opportunities requires political will and commitment.

38. The second policy imperative is to promote inclusive institutions. The report highlights the fact that the role of institutions can be either to perpetuate exclusion or to promote inclusion. Empowering workers, entrepreneurs and small producers, for instance, or pursuing inclusive landownership schemes, new forms of collective action, or greater State capacity to engage in participatory budgeting, which allows citizens to identify, discuss and prioritize public spending projects, can make economic institutions more inclusive and equitable. Similarly, promoting civil registration and legal identity, engaging with civil society and enabling the creation of social movements and local associations can help political institutions become more transparent and inclusive. Finally, promoting recognition through anti-discrimination laws and their effective enforcement, encouraging tolerance of difference and diversity and challenging exclusionary values, attitudes and behaviours are all avenues of approach to more inclusive cultural and social institutions.

39. Reversing entrenched prejudice and reforming institutions that perpetuate exclusion entail an often slow long-term process dependent on national and local circumstances, norms and behaviours with deep historical and cultural roots. This will therefore require considerable normative shifts. However, concerted efforts and long-term political commitment at the highest level make such change possible.